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Vegetable Minigardens



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Agriculture • Cooperative Extension Service
Circular 1155

COVER: A container vegetable garden on a balcony. When space is severely limited, vegetables can be grown in various kinds of containers. Container vegetable gardens not only provide fresh harvest but can enhance the appearance of balconies, patios, terraces, etc.

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Contrary to popular belief, vegetable gardens do not require large plots of ground. Small gardens — "minigardens" — can be planted in conventional soil beds in confined areas, in raised beds alongside a fence, house, or sidewalk, or in various kinds of containers. If you have adequate space, however, a standard backyard garden is usually more convenient and practicable than a minigarden. (Circular 1150, "Vegetable Gardening for Illinois," deals in detail with the planning, planting, and care of the standard backyard garden.)

There are many good reasons for planting a vegetable minigarden. A minigarden requires only a small amount of space, and can be easily incorporated into the total landscape. Homegrown vegetables are fresher and are often of better quality than those from the grocery store, are readily available, and contribute to a balanced diet. A minigarden can also be an enjoyable hobby, and offers an opportunity to grow novelty varieties that are not well adapted to the standard backyard garden.

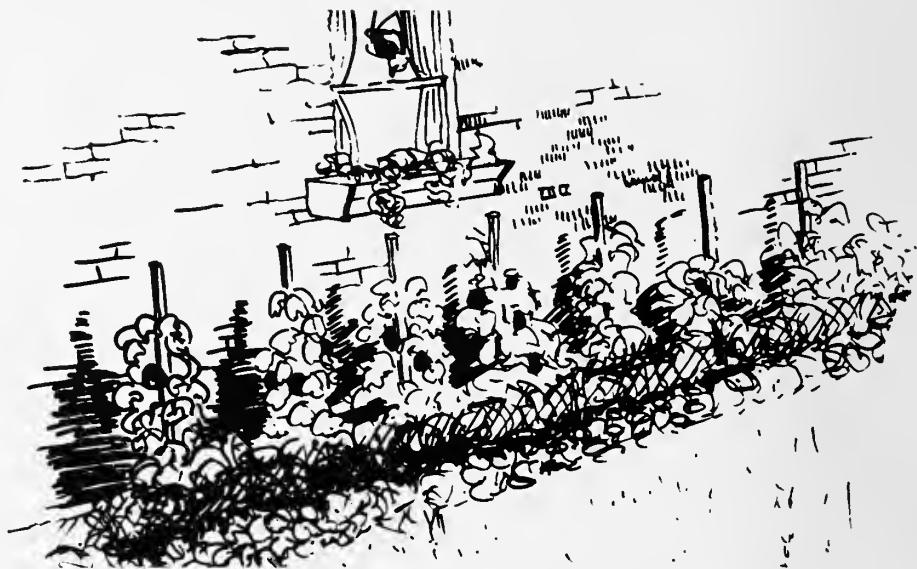
Conventional Soil-Bed Minigardens

Vegetables can be grown in conventional soil beds that range in size from small plantings around the doorway or patio to gardens measuring from 20 to 200 square feet. When space is limited, the border or background of flower gardens may be a good place to "tuck in" vegetables. The vegetable greens, tomatoes in cages, and trellised vegetables are well adapted for this purpose.

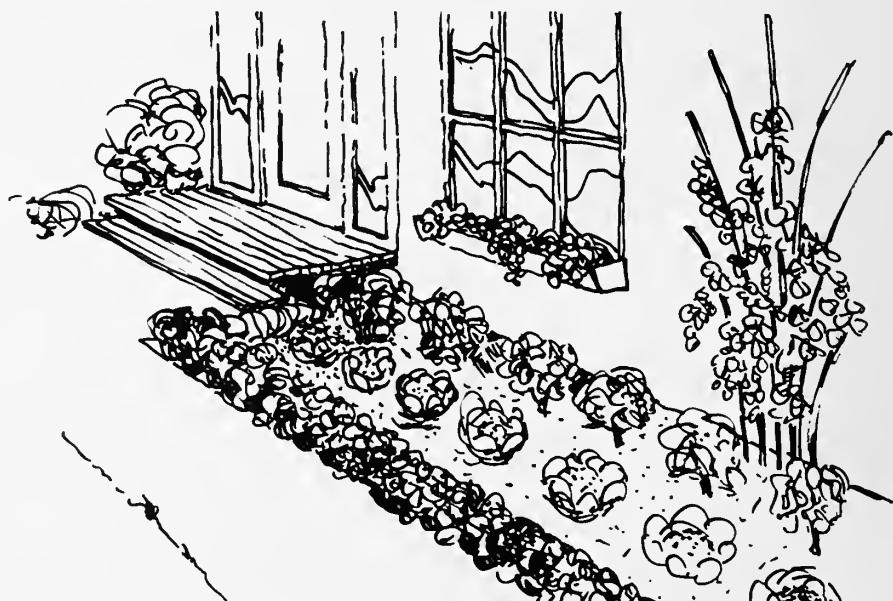
Plant vegetables with attractive leaves as border plants in the vegetable or flower garden. Lettuce, parsley, and herbs are especially suitable for the foreground, and swiss chard, asparagus, and kale for the background. Display individual characteristics of vegetable plants by growing single specimens or planting in random groupings rather than in straight rows.

Raised Beds

Raised beds are constructed above the existing soil level. The simplest kind of raised bed is rectangular in form, with the soil supported by stone, brick, telephone poles, railroad ties, or 8- to 10-inch redwood or cypress boards reinforced at the corners. The length can be adjusted to the available space, and a 3-foot width is sufficient to accommodate two or three rows of the smaller vegetables such as lettuce, carrots, and beets. Water and fertilizer can be easily controlled in raised beds. Use high-quality soil to fill the forms above the existing soil level.



Conventional soil-bed minigarden. Vegetables can be grown in conventional soil beds located next to the house or garage or at other selected sites.



Vegetable-flower conventional soil beds. Blending vegetables and flowers adds beauty to the home landscape and fresh produce to the table.

Tiered beds make it possible to grow more vegetables than in a one-level bed of comparable size. This type of growing system is especially suitable for sloping sites.

Raised beds have several advantages over conventional soil-bed mini-gardens. They can be neat and attractive; they allow you to provide good soil and proper water drainage on a poor growing site; and they warm the soil sooner in the spring, permitting early planting.

Container Gardens

Vegetables grown in containers may be both decorative and provide a fresh harvest. Container gardens can be attractive pots of kitchen herbs or parsley, hanging baskets of ripe red tomatoes, and bright leaf lettuce or fresh radishes. Tubs, raised beds, shallow boxes, metal drums, sewer tiles, rubber tires, and other containers may also be used for gardening in areas where conventional soil beds or raised beds are not practicable.

You may also use more than one container for the same vegetable and plant at intervals. This technique will establish different growth stages for vegetables such as radishes that tend to mature their harvest at one time. All containers should have bottom holes for drainage. Place stones, crushed rock, or broken pot chips over the holes to prevent plugging and to insure free drainage of excess water.

Containers may be located almost anywhere — the kitchen, patio, terrace, balcony, rooftop, or at strategic locations around the yard. Regardless of location, the containers must have light, fertilizer, water, and fresh air.

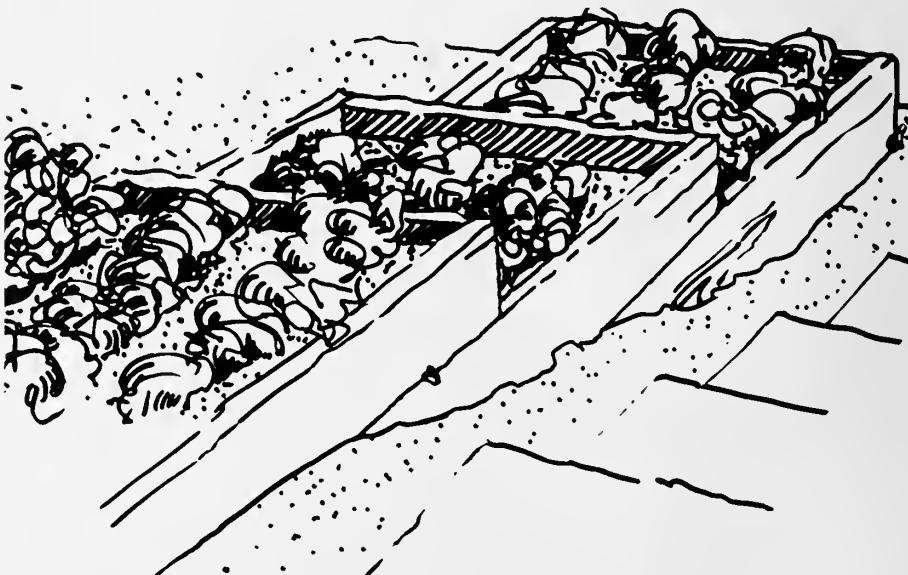
Restricting the soil volume and root system of a vegetable plant limits the plant's supply of fertility to that furnished within the container. Frequent watering is necessary to sustain this restricted root system. Trickle irrigation systems designed for the hobby gardener can supply water to container gardens.

Apply a water-soluble fertilizer (10-50-10, 20-20-20, 18-12-6, etc.) at rates of 1 tablespoon per 1 gallon of water once a week, or less often, as needed for plant growth. Slow-release-type fertilizers may also be used in containers. *Do not* use field-grade fertilizers. They cause excessive buildup of salts.

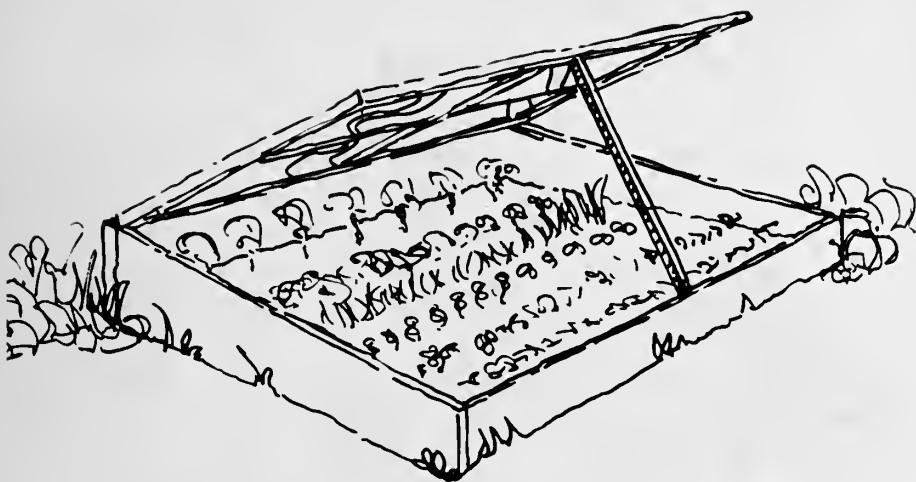
Modular arrangements of plant boxes can add effectively to the landscape decor in outdoor living areas. Containers with a 6-inch soil depth are suitable for green onions, radishes, most leaf lettuce varieties, swiss chard, parsley, and chives. An 8- to 10-inch depth should be used for larger vegetables.



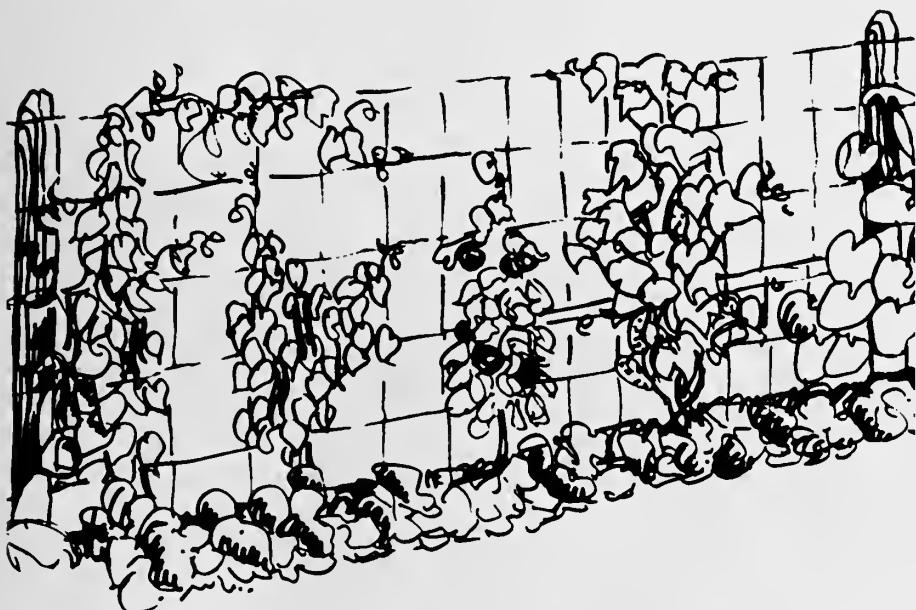
Types of containers. Clay and plastic pots, concrete blocks, sewer tiles, bushel baskets, fluted tires, etc. can be used as containers for vegetable minigardens. All containers should have bottom holes for drainage.



Raised beds. Raised beds and tiered raised beds (above) can be used as landscape accents and to overcome deficiencies in the growing environment.



Cold frame. A cold frame can be used to start transplants early in the season and as an open growing space for vegetables during the remainder of the season.



Vegetables on a fence. Trailing or vining vegetables (pole beans, tomatoes, peas, cucumbers, melons, etc.) can be planted next to a fence, trellis, building, etc. It is often necessary to tie or fasten the plants to the supporting structure.

Planting and Culture

Vegetables can be started either from seeds or from transplants. Many kinds of vegetables do not transplant readily, and must be started from seeds.

Buy transplants whenever possible to reduce the time from planting to harvest. Be sure to get healthy, good-quality transplants. You can grow your own plants if you have adequate facilities, but specialized techniques are required. (See Circulars 884 and 1150 for detailed instructions about how to grow transplants.) Avoid overcrowding, particularly with seeded vegetables, and thin when necessary to achieve vigorous growth.

Adding high-quality soil, organic materials, and fertilizer to minigardens will help correct poor soil drainage, low fertility, and inadequate water-holding capacity. Several lightweight growing materials such as peat, perlite, vermiculite, and prepared commercial mixtures are also available. These usually contain fertilizer, and offer excellent water-holding capacity.

Vegetables in containers need frequent, thorough waterings, especially in windy or exposed locations. Do not allow the soil to dry out completely between waterings. *Do not overwater.* Overwatering will reduce the growth of vegetables planted in heavy soil or poorly drained containers.

Vegetables require full sunlight for proper growth, although leafy vegetables (lettuce, swiss chard, etc.) can be grown satisfactorily in partial — but not full — shade. Train or arrange plants vertically to take advantage of restricted areas. Stakes, trellises, and fences can be used to support crops such as tomatoes or cucumbers (see Circulars 981 and 1150).

Insects, diseases, and weeds can severely reduce yields and create unsightly areas in your garden. These can be controlled by cultivation and proper use of a suggested pesticide (see the list of references on page 11).

Suggested Varieties

All vegetables, or even varieties of the same vegetable, are not equally suitable for minigardens. Vegetables that will grow in a limited space and produce a continuous growth and yield, such as tomatoes, lettuce, pepper, parsley, cucumbers, or swiss chard, are good choices.

The varieties listed on pages 9 and 10 are especially suitable for vegetable minigardens. Those varieties marked with an asterisk (*) may also be grown in containers. Characteristics that are important in selecting varieties for containers are compact, bush, or dwarf growing habits; colorful foliage or fruits; and varieties that will supplement your other garden harvests or local supply.

Varieties for Minigardens

Asparagus

Mary Washington

Bean, snap and wax

Blue Lake (snap, bush and pole)

Kinghorn Wax (bush)

Resistant Cherokee Wax (bush)

Tender Crop (snap, bush)

Bean, horticultural

French Horticultural (bush)

Beet

Detroit Dark Red

Golden Beet

Ruby Queen

Broccoli

Green Comet

Premium Crop

Brussels Sprout

Jade Cross

Cabbage

Early Jersey Wakefield

Market Prize

Red Head

Resistant Golden Acre

Savoy King

Carrot

Danvers Half-long

Finger Carrot (several varieties)

Nantes Coreless

Cauliflower

Snow Crown

Snow King

Chard

Lucullus*

Rhubarb*

Chinese Cabbage

Burpee Hybrid

Michili

Cucumber

Burpless Hybrid (trellis, slicing)*

Bush Whopper (dwarf, slicing)*

Challenger Hybrid (slicing)*

Patio Pik Hybrid (dwarf, pickling)*

Poinsett (slicing)*

Eggplant

Black Magic

Burpee Hybrid

Ichiban*

Slim Jim*

Endive

Green Curled

Salad King

Escarole

Broad Leaved Batavian

Florida Deep Heart

Kale

Dwarf Curled (Vates)

Dwarf Siberian

Kohlrabi

Early White Vienna

Leek

American Flag*

Lettuce

Bibb*

Buttercrunch*

Grand Rapids*

Prizehead*

Ruby*

Salad Bowl*

Slobolt*

Muskmelon

Short and Sweet

Sugar Bush

Okra

Clemson Spineless

* May be grown in containers.

Varieties for Minigardens

Onion, green	Floramerica*
Evergreen Long White Bunching	Jet Star
Onion, transplants	Sunripe*
Sweet Spanish	Super Fantastic
Parsley	Supersonic
Triple Curled*	Tomato, small fruits and standard-sized plants
Italian*	Gardeners' Delight*
Pepper	Sugar Lump*
Bell Boy*	Sweet 100*
California Wonder	Tomato, small fruits and dwarf plants
Gold Spike*	Patio*
Sweet Banana*	Pixie*
Yolo Wonder	Salad Top*
Pea	Small Fry*
Edible Podded (sugar pea, trellis)	Tiny Tim*
Little Marvel	Toy Boy*
Wando	Tumblin Tom*
Pumpkin	Turnip
Cinderella (bush)	Purple Top White Globe
Spirit (semivining)	Tokyo
Radish	Minor Vegetables
All Seasons	Gourds (trellis)
Champion	Husk Tomato
Comet	Shallot
Icicle	Spaghetti Squash (trellis)
Red Prince	Sunflower
Rhubarb	Herbs
Mac Donald	Anise*
Valentine	Basil*
Victoria	Chive*
Squash, Summer	Dill*
Scallopini*	Garlic*
Zucchini*	Mint (grown in containers only)*
Squash, Winter	Parsley*
Table King (bush)	Rosemary*
Tomato, standard-sized fruits and plants	Sage*
Better Boy	Summer Savory*
Big Girl	Sweet Marjoram*
Bragger	Thyme*
Burpee VF	

* May be grown in containers.

For Further Reference

The following publications contain additional information that may be helpful in growing your vegetable minigarden. These publications may be obtained from your county extension adviser or by writing to the addresses listed below. They are free unless otherwise indicated.

Office of Agricultural Publications, 123 Mumford Hall, Urbana, Illinois 61801:

Controlling Weeds in the Home Garden, Circular 1051. 12 pages.

Growing Tomatoes at Home, Circular 981. 12 pages.

Growing Vegetable Transplants, Circular 884. 32 pages.

Insect Pest Management Guide: Home, Yard, and Garden, Circular 900. 8 pages.

Landscaping Your Home, Circular 1111. 250 pages (\$4.00).

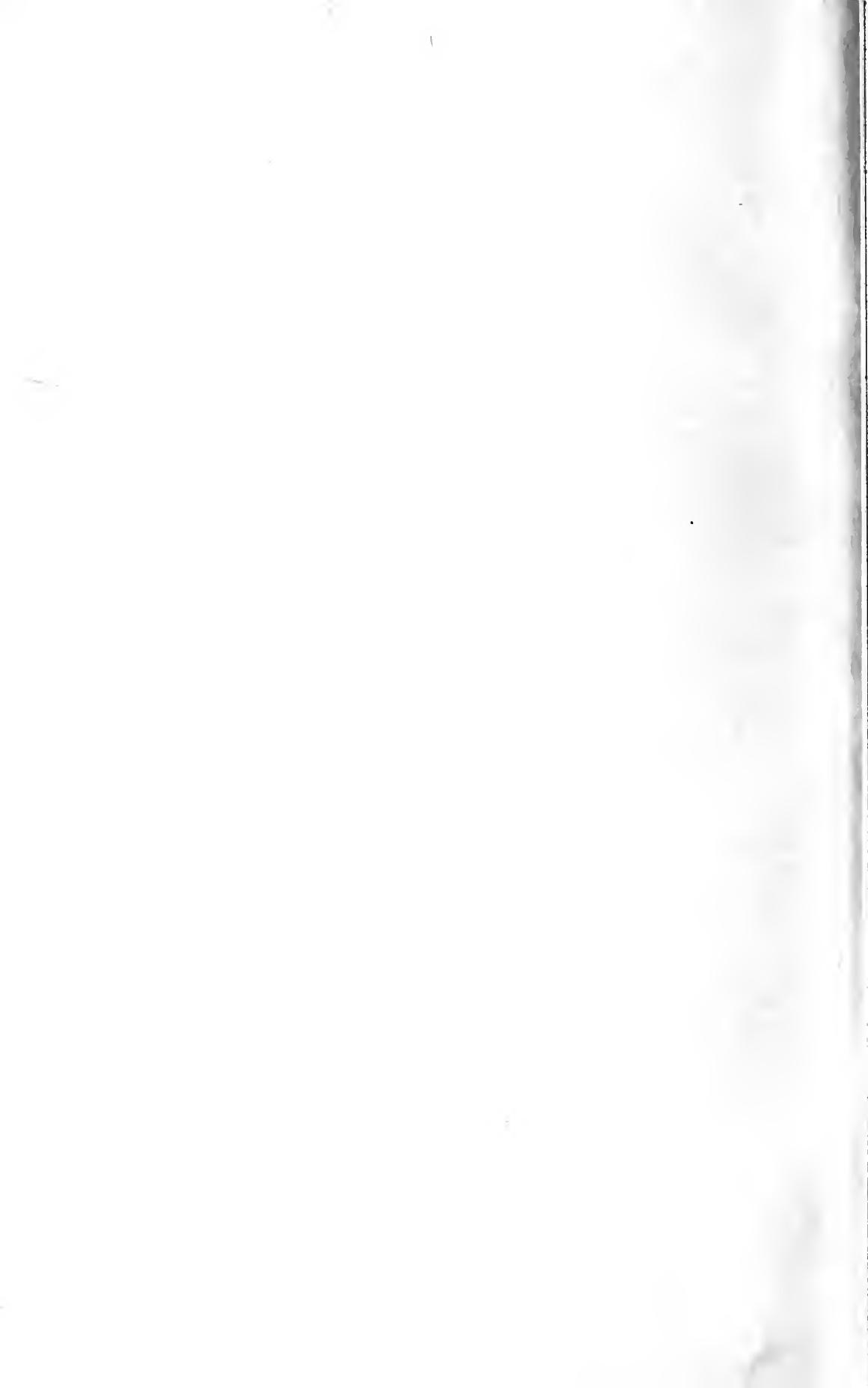
Vegetable Gardening for Illinois, Circular 1150. 136 pages (\$2.00).

Department of Plant Pathology, 218 Mumford Hall, Urbana, Illinois 61801:

Recommendations for Controlling Diseases in the Home Vegetable Garden, Report on Plant Diseases 900. 6 pages.

Department of Agricultural Engineering, 202 Agricultural Engineering Building, Urbana, Illinois 61801:

Outdoor Living — Planning and Construction Guide, MWPS-12. (Contains information about materials and construction of modular containers.) 52 pages (\$2.00).





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